



Impact of the Built Environment on Health

WHAT IS THE HEALTH ISSUE?

The built environment includes all of the physical parts of where we live and work (e.g., homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure). The built environment influences a person's level of physical activity. For example, inaccessible or nonexistent sidewalks and bicycle or walking paths contribute to sedentary habits. These habits lead to poor health outcomes such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Today, approximately two thirds of Americans are overweight.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC is working through partnerships to influence the built environment by promoting healthy community design. Examples include:

- Conducting a workshop on using health impact assessments to examine health consequences of projects and policies outside of the health sector (e.g., transportation planning) that affect health.
- Developing model zoning codes that promote development of healthy walkable communities in partnership with the American Planning Association.
- Providing information and training about healthy community design to public health professionals and planners through sponsorship of the National Association of County and City Health Officials.
- Documenting case studies of built environment projects designed to promote health.
- Developing a walkability audit for workplace settings and conducting such an audit on CDC campuses.
- Developing a certification process for healthy communities modeled on the national consensus-based standard certification for energy-efficient buildings.
- Cosponsoring a request for research proposals on obesity and the built environment with the National Institutes of Health.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS

To encourage healthy community designs in the future, CDC is building collaborations across multiple disciplines including transportation, urban planning, architecture, and public health law to work in partnership to develop guidelines, support pilot projects, and educate current and future planners and public health professionals about designing healthier communities.